

**ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN
ESTONIA AND LATVIA**

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ECMI Baltic Seminar 2000
Tønder, Denmark
7 - 10 December 2000

ECMI Report # 8

March 2001

ECMI Report # 8

European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

Director: Marc Weller

ECMI gratefully acknowledges the generous support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Lanningsfoundation, Denmark.

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Published in March 2001 by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

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INTRODUCTION

The international seminar "Accession to the European Union and National Integration in Estonia and Latvia", organised by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), took place in Tønder, Denmark, in the Danish-German border region, 7-10 December 2000. The aim of the seminar was to focus on different aspects of national integration in Estonia and Latvia, taking into account the future perspectives of "Euro-integration". It therefore touched upon problems of minority education, linguistic policies, the role of NGOs and developments in minority-related legislation.

In recent years, the ECMI has organised several meetings and seminars dedicated to the problems of national integration in Estonia. The seminar in December 2000 was the start of a series of events in the framework of a special project planned for the period 2000-2002 devoted to problems of national integration in Estonia and Latvia. It was to provide theoretical input into policy deliberations aimed at overcoming ethnic divisions within these societies. The ECMI invited 35 participants, representing international organisations, national and local governments, academic institutions, NGOs and minority organisations from Estonia and Latvia (see list of participants in the appendix).

The ECMI takes full responsibility for this report, which has not been reviewed by the seminar participants.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this report, some terms will be used in their conventional meaning for this region of Europe. The terms "Estonian", "Latvian" and "Russian" will indicate ethnic or geographical origin, not citizenship. For the purposes of this report, the term "Russian-speaking population" will be used as a synonym for "minority population", as the minority members in Estonia and Latvia most often use Russian as a means of communication. The seminar participants that represented the Russian-speaking population will be referred to as "Russian participants".

BACKGROUND

Estonia and Latvia have shared a similar history for centuries. After being subject to different western rulers (Germans, Swedes, Poles) since the 13th century, they were conquered by the Russian Empire in the 18th century, while an influential economic, religious and cultural presence of Germans continued. In the second half of the 19th century, Estonians and Latvians went through a period of ‘national awakening’, and in 1918, after the implosion of the Russian Empire, both nations declared their independence for the first time and signed peace treaties with Soviet Russia in 1920.

In 1940, one year after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, Estonia and Latvia were incorporated into the USSR and were kept part of it until 1991. Meanwhile, both Baltic states could not escape occupation by Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944, during which time local Jewish and Roma minorities were eradicated.

Between 1940 and 1991, other crucial demographic changes occurred in Estonia and Latvia. Most importantly, large groups of migrants from Russia, Ukraine and other parts of the USSR settled there, owing to the centrally planned Soviet industrialisation programmes. By 1989, the share of minorities in the population had increased almost fourfold in Estonia, reaching 38%, and twofold in Latvia, rising to 48%.¹ As a rule, the newcomers were Russian-speaking, had a very poor knowledge of local languages and paid little interest to local cultures. It made the Baltic nations suspect Moscow of special anti-Estonian and anti-Latvian intentions.²

Estonia and Latvia restored their independence after the failure of the August coup of 1991 in Moscow. At that time, the Soviet government was unable to control the situation and Russia, the biggest Union Republic, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, who supported the Balts against the Soviet President Gorbachev, recognised

¹ See tables I, II, and III in the appendix on the ethnic composition of the population and the legal status of minorities in Estonia and Latvia in 1999-2000.

² According to Manfred H. Wiegandt, ‘to perceive the continued industrialization policy in the 50s and 60s in the Baltics pursued despite... notorious labor shortage, as a deliberate attempt to bring more Russians in and as a sign for a purposeful Russification, or even claim that Soviets have employed “ethnic cleansing, colonization and other genocidal measures” in order to change the demographics of the nation seems a little bit like purposefully building up some kind of "special Baltic victim theory"’.

Estonia and Latvia as independent states. Finally, Gorbachev had to do the same and the international community followed suit.

Before August 1991, the Baltic elites sought the support of local Russians and other Russian-speakers in their quest for democracy and independence. This was natural because these minorities were very big. Moreover, historically, Russian minorities formed the backbone of local Russian-speaking communities were, officially recognised before 1940. However, the quick disintegration of the USSR made the support of local minorities far less important.³ Ethnic nationalism, anathema under Soviet rule, started to dominate the political discourse. National elites justified the ethnic policies as a practical way to gain independence and to ensure the political dominance of titular nations in Estonia and Latvia.⁴ The adoption of a cautious, even negative attitude towards Russians (and Russia) became a must for Estonian and Latvian politicians while they proclaimed their adherence to principles of democracy.

To the ruling elites of Estonia and Latvia, the policy of restitution of the pre-1940 republics implied the restoration of pre-1940 citizenship, which effectively excluded the Soviet era settlers from automatic citizenship of Estonia and Latvia. These settlers were ascribed the status of aliens (in Latvia they acquired a slightly different status), who have the right to apply for citizenship through naturalisation, with the exception of the Soviet ex-military personnel. According to the Laws on Citizenship, naturalisation requires the passing of exams in titular languages. As the titular language competence of the Russian-speakers was relatively poor (according to the 1989 census, only 15% of ethnic Russians in Estonia knew Estonian, and 22% of ethnic Russians in Latvia knew Latvian), the naturalisation process tended to be slow.

Manfred H. Wiegandt.' "The Russian Minority in Estonia", *International Journal on Group Rights* 3 1995, p.117.

³ At the same time many Russians were actively involved in the pro-independence movement. See, for example, Aleksei Semjonov *Estonia: Nation Building and Integration, Political and Legal Aspects*, COPRI, 2000, p. 5 ff.

⁴ 'For centuries, Balts had only two choices: to survive or to merge into larger nations. You could say that we decided, subconsciously but collectively, to survive. So for us, nationalism is a mode of existence' (Enn Soosaar, Estonian translator and columnist). Quotation from Anatol Lieven *The Baltic Revolution. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994, p. 18.

The situation was aggravated by an initial lack of political will on the part of the Estonian and Latvian authorities to integrate the Russian-speaking minorities. Characteristically, even naturalised Russian-speakers in both states often complain of exclusion from key aspects of society as a consequence of their language preference. Although in a dominant position after independence, many Estonians and Latvians remained preoccupied with the protection of their 'national' identity, perceiving themselves as minorities vis-à-vis Russian-speakers.

After 1991, the proficiency of Russian-speakers in titular languages started to improve, but less so among the adult population. For example, in Estonia, polls show that many older minority members have given up the idea of mastering the state language, especially after the language requirements for citizenship became more demanding in 1995.⁵

To date, naturalisation has not yet solved the problem of statelessness among minorities. Stateless residents, together with an assumed group of illegal inhabitants, still compose approximately 200,000 or almost 15% of the total population of Estonia and over 550,000 or 20% of the population of Latvia. Therefore, the level of knowledge of the official language required for passing the citizenship exam has been, and remains, a very hotly debated issue in Estonia and Latvia. Another such issue is the future of Russian language public schools, at the "Gymnasium" level of which (grades 10-12) the language of instruction is to be the state language, starting 2004 in Latvia and 2007 in Estonia.

It has been admitted that citizenship and migration policies were intended to stimulate the repatriation of Soviet-era settlers.⁶ The introduction of state languages, exacerbated by language proficiency requirements in all spheres of life, including the private sector, significantly curbed the job opportunities available to monolingual minority members, thus creating an additional motive for repatriation. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of minority members left Estonia and Latvia. However, by the middle of the 1990s, this repatriation, or 'velvet deportation'

⁵ <http://www.oef.org.ee/research/contents.html>

came to end. As shown in many sociological surveys, the overwhelming majority of Russian-speakers, now living in Estonia and Latvia, have decided to stay. This is what put national integration on the political agenda in both Estonia and Latvia.

In 1997, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started to energetically lobby the governments of Estonia and Latvia for the adoption of a strategy of national integration and helped prepare the necessary introductory documents towards that end. As a result of this 'supportive pressure', the Estonian and Latvian governments, after some hesitation, finally embarked on what may be a genuine course of national integration in 1998/1999. It was an important step, acknowledging the changes that had taken place in Estonia and Latvia.

However, while the documents adopted by the governments of Estonia⁷ and Latvia⁸ on national integration can be considered as steps in the right direction, they have failed to win unanimous support from among the titular elites and minority representatives alike. Conflicting opinions have emerged within Estonian and Latvian societies on the nature and aims of integration efforts, based on mutual fears held by the titular nations and minorities since the beginning of the 1990s. While the titular nations stress the importance of learning the state language as a means to integration, the Russian-speakers emphasise the need to improve their legal status in the first place. These disagreements are unfolding in the context of the EU accession discussions in Estonia and Latvia and of the strained relations of these countries with Russia over the treatment of Russian-speakers. All this has a potentially negative impact on integration efforts.

Estonia and Latvia have been selected by the European Union for the first and second wave of accession negotiations respectively. Membership of the EU implies that the Copenhagen criteria for respect and protection of minorities have to be implemented. Therefore, it is not surprising that the European Commission has explicitly referred to

⁶ The former Chief-Director of the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board, Andres Kollist, in his interview to the magazine *Luup* (#3, 2000) openly recognised that the aim of the policymakers of the early 90s in Estonia was "to make Russians' life hell".

⁷ *The State Programme "Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007"* can be accessed at <http://www.riik.ee/saks/ikomisjon>

⁸ *The Integration of Society in Latvia: A Framework Document*. Riga: The Naturalisation Board of the Republic of Latvia, 1999. Also available at: <http://www.np.gov.lv/en/fjas/integracija.htm>

the problems of the integration of Russian-speakers in its Regular Reports of 1998, 1999 and 2000 on the progress of Estonia and Latvia towards accession.⁹

While approximately 20,000 people were naturalised annually in Estonia in the period from 1994 to 1996, only 8,124 in 1997 and 9,969 in 1998 received Estonian citizenship. In 1999, this figure dropped to 4,534. In 2000, only 3,425 people were naturalised.¹⁰ If this pace of naturalisation persists, Estonia will still have more than 150,000 stateless permanent residents or more than 10% of the population in 2003, when the country is supposed to be ready for EU membership.

By that time, Latvia, where until recently the naturalisation process was very slow, will have a similar share of stateless residents. This will complicate its accession negotiations with the EU. The annual capacity of Latvia to process naturalisation applications currently stands at 20,000. If this capacity remains unchanged, the process of naturalisation could take decades to be completed.

OPENING OF THE SEMINAR

Mr **Priit Järve**, Senior Analyst of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) greeted the participants on behalf of the ECMI and opened the seminar. He stressed that the meeting was organised with the view to:

- promote the minority - majority dialog in Estonia and Latvia
- compare the problems and achievements of national integration in the two countries
- stress the importance of the involvement of NGOs and local governments in the process
- draft recommendations for the follow-up events, i.e. the workshops in Estonia and Latvia planned for 2001-2002

⁹ See the Regular Reports of 2000 from the European Commission on Estonia's and Latvia's progress towards accession at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/dwn/report_11_00/pdf/en/es_en.pdf and http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/dwn/report_11_00/pdf/en/lv_en.pdf respectively.

THE FIRST SESSION: INTEGRATION IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA: WHERE DO WE STAND?

The Estonian Minister of Population Affairs, Ms **Katrin Saks**, presented the first results of the realisation of the State Integration Programme 2000-2007, approved by the Cabinet in March 2000. The Programme includes 4 sub-programmes: “Education”, “The education and culture of ethnic minorities”, “The teaching of Estonian to adults” and “Social competence”.

Minister Saks dedicated the first part of her presentation to the review of the problems of legal-political integration. In 1992, 68% of the population of Estonia were citizens, in 2000 their share had increased to 77%. Twelve per cent of the total population are persons with ‘undetermined citizenship’, 8% are citizens of other states (mostly of the Russian Federation) and at least 3% are so-called “illegals”. According to the governmental Coalition Agreement, the foundations of citizenship and migration policies will remain unchanged, although it acknowledges that certain steps have to be made to improve administrative capacity and to reduce technical barriers. Thus, simplified procedures of naturalisation were approved for stateless children and for disabled persons, while for other applicants professional language exams and naturalisation language tests were integrated into a common system. Additionally, some correctives were made to render the annual migration quota system more flexible. Today the quota is not applied to aliens who settled in Estonia before 1 July 1990 (including illegals), to citizens of the EU, the USA, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Japan, to spouses of Estonian citizens if they have a common child or if the wife is pregnant. According to a recent sociological poll, 52.7% of the aliens (i.e. persons without citizenship) would apply for Estonian citizenship in order to feel secure living in Estonia, whereas the right to vote in parliament elections would be an incentive for only 12% of them.

The minister made some remarks concerning other important legal acts, e.g. the Law on Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities. As no cultural self-governments were established since the adoption of this act in 1993, certain modifications in this law

¹⁰ Baltic News Service, 27 December 2000.

could be made if required, using international experience. Some changes have already been made in the Law on Language in order to remove any concerns regarding the compliance of this law with the provisions of the Treaty of the European Union. In 2000, some amendments were introduced to the Law on Basic Schools (grades 1-9) and Gymnasiums (grades 10-12). Estonian will be the language of instruction in all municipal and state funded Gymnasiums starting with the school year 2007/2008. The language of instruction is defined by law as the language in which at least 60% of the curriculum is taught.

With the support of 3.64 m Estonian kroons (EEK) in foreign donations (\$0.202 m), several advertisement campaigns were organised, several TV-shows produced, and printed information prepared to meet the goals of the sub-programme “Social competence”. The state budget also supported some media projects with the sum of EEK 1.79 m (\$0.1m).

In conclusion, Minister Saks analysed differences in attitudes of Estonians and non-Estonians at the beginning and at the end of the 1990s. Ten years ago, both groups were influenced by recent social developments, Estonians feeling threatened and non-Estonians experiencing a crisis of identity. According to the ethnic relations survey of March 2000, knowledge of Estonian was important for both groups, however, Estonians also demonstrated a high level of tolerance, especially young Estonians. The Minister stressed that these are favourable preconditions for strengthening political loyalty of non-Estonians towards the Estonian state, which they regard more positively than a Russian system of government.

Responding to the questions of the audience concerning citizenship issues, Minister Saks confirmed the importance of participation of non-Estonians in political life. Explaining a bigger number of the Russian Federation's citizens in Estonia (compared to Latvia, which has relatively similar naturalisation principles), Minister Saks referred to practical reasons important for minority members (e.g., to travel easily to Russia).

Information about the progress in society integration in Latvia was presented by the Minister of Justice, Ms **Ingrīda Labucka**. She reported that the managerial group

formed under the ordinance of the president in February 1999 drew up the concept for the state programme “Society Integration in Latvia”, which was accepted by the Cabinet in December 1999. In July 2000 a short version of the Programme was adopted.

There are several organs that deal with society integration in Latvia. First of all, in March 1998 the Society Integration Council was founded. It consists of the Minister of Justice (chairperson), the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Welfare. In November 2000, the Ministry of Justice established the Department of Social Integration with the responsibilities to coordinate the implementation of the integration policy and execution of the state programme; to work out criteria and guidelines for project evaluation, to follow through their execution and to establish a database. It also has to cooperate with NGOs, municipalities, state institutions, foreign embassies, international organisations, participate in the drafting of relevant international agreements, and develop and implement a PR-strategy. Additionally, the Minister of Justice has established a consultative council on the matters of social integration that consists of representatives of the Presidential Chancellery, municipalities, NGOs and observers from the UNDP and OSCE missions.

In July 2000, the Cabinet ordered the Ministry of Justice to draft the Law on the Foundation of Social Integration. The adoption of the law in parliament is expected for the beginning of 2001. The draft law provides for the establishment of a state joint-stock company operating under supervision of the Ministry of Justice. The Cabinet decided that the equity capital of the company would be 25,000 Latvian lats (LVL) (\$15,500). The Foundation’s resources will be formed by allocations from the state budget. The Cabinet supported the implementation of the law with LVL 200,000 (\$124,000).

Four state trustees (one from each of the profile ministries) will perform their functions at shareholders’ meetings. The Foundation will also have a Council with seven members (five from the ministries, one from the Latvian Association of Municipalities and one from NGOs) and a Board. The law provides for seven sub-committees with consultative functions (social participation, social integration,

regional integration, culture, education, language and social communication and research). The Foundation is to be opened by 1 April 2001. It will deal with the distribution of allocated state funds in the interests of social integration. For this purpose the Foundation will work out criteria for the evaluation and funding of projects, determining priorities in agreement with the Society Integration Council and ensuring the transparency of the process.

Minister Labucka then gave an example of a successful attempt to formulate problems, attitudes and methods for the creation of an integrated open society on the level of municipality. In the city of Ventspils a special working group, which examined the experience of several EU states and cities, prepared a local integration programme. This document puts emphasis on education and language, social integration and involvement of the population. The main activities include courses on Latvian history, culture and civil education for teachers; assistance to under-age non-citizens in the naturalisation process; cooperation with national cultural organisations, NGOs and mass media; and assistance to disabled persons and pensioners.

Numerous questions and statements of seminar participants followed the presentation by Minister Labucka. Russian participants from Latvia and western experts expressed concerns about the slow pace of naturalisation (if it remains the same, the naturalisation of all non-citizens will require several decades). The costs of the naturalisation process are high for the state (budgetary sums for the Naturalisation Board) and for individuals (fees of 30 LVL, or \$18.6). A participant from Estonia stressed the importance of the involvement of NGOs in the activities of the Foundation of Social Integration. NGOs' assistance in analysing and drafting legislation was also considered very useful. Participants were interested in how Latvians are involved in integration projects and were informed by an official from Latvia that Latvians are indeed active in different programmes, e.g. language camps. The same official, answering to the suggestion that it is necessary to amend legislation concerning minorities, expressed the view that the constitutional laws promote minority rights, while admitting that the term 'multiculturalism' could be hardly found in these texts.

THE SECOND SESSION: MINORITY EDUCATION AND INTEGRATION

Minister **Saks** presented the sub-programme “Education” of the Estonian State Programme of Integration, which can be divided into different parts. The first two parts are dedicated to basic, Gymnasium and vocational education. One of the main problems here is teaching of Estonian as the second language. The number of teachers required is estimated at approximately 800 (in the school year 1999/2000 there were 717). The introduction of a special status of ‘teacher of the state language’ and a scholarship programme for pedagogues, should increase the efficiency of teaching Estonian. In addition, within the Northern Council (NC)/ United Kingdom/ UNDP project and the EU Phare Estonian Language Training Programme in 1998-2000 many important steps were made to develop the national curriculum and methodological material.

The third part of the sub-programme is dedicated to extracurricular youth work. From 1997 to 2000, 6,830 children studied Estonian in special language camps or in Estonian families. The realisation of the fourth part "Youth in public-law universities and higher vocational institutions" was possible in the framework of the above-mentioned projects, funded by foreign sponsors and they were normally aimed at intensive language courses.

Support of the sub-programme “Education and culture of ethnic minorities in Estonia” was as follows: from 1996 to 2000 the Ministry of Culture allocated approximately EEK 7.65 m (\$0.426 m) for that propose. The non-Estonians’ Integration Foundation supported ethnic cultural organisations from 1998 to 2000 with the sum of EEK 0.235 m (\$0.013 m) from budget sources and with EEK 0.514 m (\$0.029 m) from NC/UK/UNDP sources. In 2000, funds were also received from the Ministry of Education and the City of Tallinn.

Minister **Saks** underlined the importance of the sub-programme “The teaching of Estonian to adults”. Under the EU Phare Estonian Language Training Programme from 1998 to 2000, about 8,000 adults participated in language courses. From 1998 to 2000, EEK 0.44 m (\$0.024 m) were spent as part of the project of the Northern Council/UK/UNDP on adult training, when models like “Labour force mobility” (for

police officers, local officials, unemployed) and “Teaching of Estonian by tutors” were tested. The Minister pointed out that, according to a recent sociological poll, 23.2% of the non-Estonians have recently improved their skills of the Estonian language through special language classes, 5.9% at universities, 26.4% independently and 6.9% with the help of a private teacher.

Responding to questions of the audience concerning the pending changes of Russian language schools, Minister Saks said that ‘Local Russian politicians inspire protests concerning the chosen model of school education (60% in the Estonian language), not ordinary people’. She considered the preservation of Russian cultural identity secured in the framework of the present Integration Programme. It is also backed by activities on the basis of inter-ministerial agreement between Estonia and Russia. Decrease in academic hours dedicated to studying Russian as a mother tongue took place because of a general reduction of mother tongue tuition in the national curriculum, affecting Russian and Estonian language schools alike.

During the discussion, problems of integration in general and the basis of education policies were touched upon. A participant from Estonia argued that the latest decision to teach all subjects or 60% of them in Estonian in Russian language schools was a political decision made without serious analysis of the situation. During the last 10 years the government did too little to improve the knowledge of Estonian among teachers of such schools. This could call into question the very possibility of bilingual education in the near future. It also means that Russian teachers are isolated from many Estonian language sources of information.

In the following presentation, Ms **Evija Papule**, Head of the Department of Integration of the Ministry of Education and Science, highlighted the problems of minority education and integration in Latvia. In June 1999, the parliament adopted the new Law on Education, which envisages a 3-year transitional period. Starting in the academic year 1999/2000, minority schools can choose one or several models of sub-programmes of basic education, taking into consideration the demands of parents, actual resources of schools and the background of pupils. Starting with the academic year 2004/2005, the language of instruction at secondary schools will be Latvian, or programmes of bilingual education for minorities should be implemented. The

models of education for minorities were elaborated, taking into account research on bilingual education in Latvia and in the world and analysis of the practical situation in the republic.

Ms Papule regretted that many teachers, parents and pupils are not informed about the proposed system of bilingual education and its advantages. Only once this system has been introduced, special attention will be paid to the language and culture of national minorities in Latvia. Nevertheless, successful implementation of the programmes of basic education of minorities and programmes of bilingual education requires the solution of several problems. Firstly, equality in the knowledge of the state language must be guaranteed. Secondly, new textbooks and methodological literature (common for Latvian and minority schools) should be published to introduce the problems of intercultural education, multiculturalism, and multilingualism to the curricula. Furthermore, language courses for two thousand teachers are to be organised each year to ensure the transition to bilingual education. The publishing of special methodological and information material, cooperation between Latvian and minority schools and special courses will be funded in the framework of the Soros Foundation Latvia /Ministry of Education and Science co-project “Open School”.

In the ensuing discussion, Russian participants from Latvia criticised the officially promoted model of minority school education. They attacked the declarative assumption that integration involves Latvians and non-Latvians alike. They argued that the present integration policy has a strong assimilative effect and that the Latvian government does not recognise the Russian-speaking linguistic minority. Russian participants stressed that the school reform is aimed basically at changing the language of instruction. They considered this reform neither well founded nor well funded and thought this could influence the average level of education of minority members negatively . Latvian officials rejected such an understanding of their own policies. They stressed the right of choice concerning the models of education and the unity of the school education system notwithstanding different languages of instruction. At the same time they explained that the reform is not meant to develop Russian language schools.

A Russian participant from Latvia presented his vision of alienation of the non-Latvian population from the state caused by practices of ethnic preferences. Thus, among 196 persons appointed as judges by the parliament during the last two years, only one was Russian (the ethnicity of candidates was stated in their CVs). Non-Latvians are used to live without citizenship and they see no reasons to integrate into a community that promotes exclusive policies towards them. Real integration is possible only after the effective abolishment of any privileges based on ethnic origin, the Russian participant stated. A Latvian participant from Latvia also recognised the fact of alienation of the Russian-speaking population from the state. To his mind, the situation in Latvia could be better explained by using the term ‘alienation’, not ‘assimilation’.

Two representatives of Estonia shared the experiences of the Presidential Roundtable on National Minorities with the audience. This consultative organ has recently been reformed and now includes three groups of experts from minority groups, scholars and representatives of political parties, which also arrange meetings together with the cultural societies of minorities. Some recommendations of the Roundtable have been taken into consideration by the Estonian authorities. At the same time, in many cases this organ has failed to influence the political decision-making process (e.g., preparation of the State Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities). The members of the Roundtable still experience a certain lack of normality in the dialog with officials.

Then Russian participants from Estonia questioned the efficiency of the Estonian ombudsman office in the sphere of interethnic affairs. They denied the possibility and necessity of linguistic transition of Russian public Gymnasiums after the year 2007. They stressed that it is an advantage for the majority to study Russian, which is an internationally used language. An Estonian official pointed out that Russian is studied as a second foreign language by two thirds of Estonian pupils. The problem is ‘to put Russian to its normal place’. A Latvian participant argued that ‘minorities will never be completely satisfied’ to which a Western expert responded that ‘not to be completely satisfied’ is normally understood as an obligation of a citizen in a democratic state.

Western experts stressed anew the importance to promote naturalisation in Estonia and Latvia. In their opinion, all artificial obstacles should be removed. Latvian officials assured the participants that they are eager to improve the psychological atmosphere during the naturalisation procedures.

THE THIRD SESSION: LANGUAGES AND INTEGRATION

Mr **Ilmar Tomusk**, Director General of the Estonian Language Inspection, presented a review of use of different languages in Estonia. Russian is normally spoken in the northeastern towns and in Tallinn. In other places Estonians compose a majority and minorities are linguistically well integrated. Mr Tomusk explained that there are three types of linguistic groups in Estonia: firstly, a majority speaking the language of a small nation (Estonians), secondly, a minority speaking the language of a large nation (e.g. Russians whose language influences the linguistic situation in Estonia, having extensive resources in terms of its mother country and the status of a world language) and, thirdly, a minority speaking the language of a small nation (e.g. Estonians in the cities in the north-eastern part of the country and other ethnic groups).

Mr Tomusk argued that the introduction of the Estonian language skill requirements was a necessary precondition for the normalisation of the language situation in Estonia, for guaranteeing the status of the state language, and for the integration of the Estonian society. Thus, linguistic requirements for citizenship applicants and civil servants were established as well as requirements for private sphere workers. The latest requirements were re-established in 1999, and the relevant amendments to the Law on Language caused a discussion. Following the OSCE experts' recommendations, these requirements were conditioned by workplace and consumer protection needs and by environmental, health or safety interests.

On the basis of the 1995 Law on Citizenship about 2,500 persons annually sit a language examination that is the equivalent to the beginners test. Since 2000, the final exams in Estonian at schools and Gymnasiums are equated with the naturalisation test. The State Examination and Qualification Centre under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education is responsible for developing these tests and

examinations. Being an associate member of the Association of Language Testers in Europe, the Centre is working according to the rules generally accepted in the West.

The tests for work-related Estonian language proficiency comprise four parts to check skills on listening, reading, speaking and writing. Since September 1999, 3,260 people passed these exams and the majority of them (2,351) did it for the lowest of three established levels of proficiency.

During recent years, more than one hundred ethnic cultural societies were registered to preserve and develop minority languages and culture. There are also 104 secondary schools that use Russian as a language of instruction. In some state and municipally funded schools one or several subjects are taught in German, Swedish, Hebrew or Ukrainian. In two Gymnasiums there are classes where all subjects are taught in German. The final examinations in those schools are harmonised with the German system that provides pupils with an opportunity to enter universities in Germany. There are several Sunday schools and language courses in minority languages. Among 27 private schools, nine use Russian as a means of instruction. Nine private college-style higher educational establishments are also using Russian as the language of instruction.

Minority languages are actively used in the mass media. The Estonian Radio broadcasts in Russian (Radio 4) and produces programmes in Armenian, Finnish, Byelorussian, Swedish, German and English. The Estonian TV and other channels have regular Russian language programmes. In 2000, the Estonian TV launched a bilingual Estonian-Russian TV-programme. Several Russian language newspapers are published in Estonia, including two national dailies. Russian is widely used in the Estonian Internet, including official web sites. The most important legal acts are available in Russian translation.

Responding to questions, Mr Tomusk confirmed that the government has twice rejected an appeal by the city council of Sillamäe (95% Russian-speaking) to use Russian officially as an internal working language (this right is stipulated in the Constitution and in the Law on Language but needs to be granted on a case by case basis by the government). The reason given was that Russian was in fact already in

use there. As any public signs and public advertising in non-Estonian languages are banned, the Language Inspection has addressed the parliament with the proposal to make an exception for local elections in which many non-citizens can vote. In Mr Tomusk's opinion, the implementation of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, which Estonia has ratified, will be a burden for local governments. Mr Tomusk was not worried that English is used as a means of communication in contacts between Estonian and Russian youth in Estonia. According to Mr Tomusk, the real problem is the quality of spoken and written Estonian of ethnic Estonians.

Russian participants from Estonia gave some examples of rigid linguistic policies in the country. One of them argued that the democratic principle of non-interference is not respected when we have to talk about state language proficiency requirements for non-Estonian deputies in the parliament and local councils. Another participant stressed that teachers and administration personnel of Russian schools in Estonia are constantly under the threat of language inspections.

The next presentation by Ms **Ina Druviete**, Head of the Department of the Institute of Latvian Language, University of Latvia, was dedicated to the theoretical aspects of linguistic policies. She held the view that such policies, in connection with cultural and educational policies, have socio-linguistic and local (domestic) levels. The basic components of linguistic policies are: legal (Constitution, special laws), linguistic and pedagogical (taking into account peculiarities associated with the status of languages - a state language, minority language, foreign language, etc.).

Ms. Druviete argued that language skills, use of a language, and attitudes to a language should not be equated. In the Latvian case, theories of language acquisition were studied in order to avoid any harmful effects of starting foreign language training too early. At the same time, minorities have an obligation to study the majority language and such studies are the most important factor of integration.

Responding to questions, Ms Druviete rejected the applicability of the models of Switzerland or Belgium in Latvia, arguing that these two states have a federal structure, while her country has a unitary one. In her opinion, the present use of

Russian in Latvia should be limited. The vicious circle of self-sufficiency of the minority language needs to be broken, she claimed. Estonian and Latvian languages are not real majority languages and need special protection, while an appropriate solution should be found to avoid assimilation of minorities (their languages are safeguarded by legal acts). Ms Druviete stated that in socio-linguistic terms legal equality of Russian and Latvian (Estonian) would effectively mean collective bilingualism (that would have assimilative character, implying that Russian would have some priority). Official policies are aimed at bilingual minorities, not majorities. Such statements led the seminar participants to a discussion about a theoretical possibility to attribute official status to Russian, taking into account Latvian and Estonian constitutional provisions. Ms Druviete alleged that only local Russian radicals demand Russian to be the second state language. Representatives of moderate Russian parties from Latvia and Estonia challenged this assumption.

Ms Druviete argued that the present Latvian linguistic policies were right and scientifically proven. They have resulted in considerable improvement of Latvian language skills of minorities; they have furthered the use of Latvian (especially in contact with officialdom) and made this language an important integrative factor; at the same time, these policies did not result in conflicts related to attitude to the state language. Ms Druviete pointed out that there are some similarities between Latvian and Estonian language policies, especially before the adoption of the 1995 Law on Language in Estonia and after the amendments to that law in 1999.

Russian participants from Latvia and Estonia, who participated very actively in this discussion, stressed that the present linguistic policies were a choice of the majority (both ethnic and political) and that the vital needs of minorities were ignored. Good practices of Estonia and Latvia before 1940 were not taken into account. In both countries the use of the state language is enforced in many ways, and sometimes it looks as though the aim is to create new job opportunities for the majority in certain sectors of the economy.

A Russian participant from Latvia argued that a modest liberalisation of language policies (e.g., new regulations that legalised Russian translation of street signs) did not have catastrophic consequences, as had been predicted by nationalists, whereas

some unreasonable restrictions, such as limitations on the use of minority languages on TV, are undermining the economic efficiency of some business projects.

According to several Russian participants the use of the terms ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘integration’ is misleading under the present circumstances in Estonia and Latvia. They also questioned the possibility (and necessity) of assimilation of demographically strong minorities and expressed concerns that present policies could lead to marginalisation of entire ethnic groups. A majority representative from Estonia acknowledged that the realisation of the Integration Programme would promote moderate assimilation of minorities. Other majority members drew attention to some positive trends in local language policies.

THE FOURTH SESSION: INTEGRATION AND THE ROLE OF NGOS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

In the beginning of his presentation Mr **Agu Laius**, Director of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute, Tallinn, regretted that until 1997 only one channel of integration - language studies - was used. Without public discussion, Estonians were not aware of minority problems and there was neither a friendly atmosphere nor assistance to promote non-Estonians' integration in the society.

Mr Laius stressed that the freedom of association is highly appreciated and safeguarded in Estonia. After the adoption of two new laws – the Law on NGOs and the Law on Foundations – 13,000-15,000 NGOs and foundations started their work. Leaders of NGOs were pioneers in the grassroots integration activities even before the term ‘integration’ entered the public discourse. The role of experienced NGOs could not be overestimated.

In 1997, the Open Estonia Foundation (OEF) called experts from different NGOs and educational institutions to found a working group, which could identify and realise concrete projects, aimed at changing social stereotypes and promoting integration. The group was governed by the idea that integration was necessary to safeguard the national interests of Estonia in the near future. The development of the Estonian state

and preservation of the Estonian ethnic nation could be guaranteed only by creating clear perspectives for non-Estonians as an inevitable part of Estonian society. However, integration should not be a centrally administrated chain of activities. The state can provide for a positive political environment, i.e. by adopting legal acts, allocating funds, and organising administration of concrete programmes. Such programmes could be efficiently implemented only through people's voluntary activities. Thus, the third sector should be regarded as the engine of integration.

The working group approved a mega-project of OEF, which consisted of 6 projects.

1. *Estonia as a multicultural society: correction of models of behaviour in inter-ethnic communication.* Within this project an international conference was organised and the book "Estonia's Integration Landscape: from Apathy to Harmony" was published.
2. *Individual and permanent language-studies for Russian children in Estonian families.* As a result over 600 non-Estonian children were taught Estonian and they got acquainted with the culture of Estonian families.
3. *Non-Estonians in Estonian universities.* This project was intended to raise a young non-Estonian elite.
4. *State officials in a multicultural environment: training in communication skills.*
5. *Reflecting ethnic relations in the mass media.* The aim of the project was to promote publication on integration-related topics.
6. *Monitoring of integration of non-Estonians into the Estonian society.*

Mr Laius argued that the realisation of this mega-project had a considerable impact on the perception of inter-ethnic relations in Estonia. In 1998, the government approved the Basis of the State Integration Policy and established the Non-Estonians' Integration Foundation. He considered it regrettable, though, that the Foundation does not discuss its strategy with NGOs or explain its principles of activities sufficiently .

Commenting on the presentation by Mr Laius an Estonian official stated that NGOs are free to participate in the integration activities where in fact, the official considered them to be widely involved. Another participant from Estonia regretted that NGOs dealing with the so-called groups of risk do not enjoy sufficient financing.

Then Mr **Vyacheslav Vasin** from the Russian Society in Latvia offered his vision of the role that NGOs and local self-governments play in the field of integration. In the

introduction he characterised the minority situation in Latvia. According to him, the Russian-speaking population is experiencing great difficulties, being effectively excluded from the political decision-making process, underrepresented in the administration, and suffering direct and indirect discrimination. Its vital needs are neglected by linguistic, informational, educational and vocational policies, which are pursued in the interests of the ethnic majority. The ethical aspect of such policies is not present in official discourse. Mr Vasin argued that the present Latvian ethnic policy is not being implemented within a developed legal framework. The relevant laws have declarative character and lack mechanisms of implementation. Many interconnected problems in the sphere of Latvian language teaching and naturalisation are still unsolved.

Mr Vasin informed the participants that there are about 3,000 NGOs in Latvia and 150 organisations with ethnic attributes. He pointed out that the biggest group among ethnic minorities, the Russians, is not a uniform community and that it would therefore be unrealistic to expect it to be represented by a single NGO or society. Instead, Mr Vasin would prefer a decentralised system of organisations with a collective strategy. He regarded it as desirable that minority NGOs are aimed at protecting the very basic needs of the non-Latvian community and argued that their activities should not be limited to the cultural domain only. Mr Vasin stressed that integration could be started at the level of NGOs. He warned not to overestimate the cooperation of minority NGOs with local governments. This issue will be more topical in the future, following the increased share of non-Latvians in the local electorate.

After this presentation, seminar participants gave some positive examples of involvement of local governments in the integration process in Latvia (e.g., in the city of Liepaja). Others stressed the selective character of the contacts of officials with NGOs in both republics and thought that many majority and minority members perceive integration as a lucrative business. A Russian participant reported the attempt to influence an educational policy paradigm by a forum organised in Latvia. Representatives of tens of thousands of parents of Russian-speaking pupils attended the conference 'To study in the Native Language' in Riga on 25 November 2000. The statement of the conference participants appealed to the government and parliament

for changes in the present educational paradigm, which they believe, is aimed at assimilation of minorities. They demanded lessons of Latvian, not in Latvian (except for certain subjects). They insisted that for this purpose the preservation (and restoration) of education in Russian is required.

THE FIFTH SESSION: INTEGRATION AND LEGISLATION

Mr **Artis Pabriks**, Lecturer at the Vidzeme University College, Latvia, characterised the continuum of different legal acts that affect minorities in Latvia. Starting with the period 1989-1997, he made references to different laws regarding citizenship, state language, minority rights, etc. Thus, in 1989, the first Law on Language was adopted. It was to protect Latvian and stipulated a principle of bilingualism, which was annulled by a new variant of the law three years later. Only in 1994, the naturalisation requirements were introduced together with the so-called window system, which defined which groups of the alien population were eligible for naturalisation each year. These restrictions were removed by a referendum in 1998, leading to a change of the Law on Citizenship.

Mr Pabriks stressed that laws adopted after 1998 were in favour of integration. He referred to new constitutional provisions on human rights, several linguistic regulations, and the introduction of bilingual education. He rejected the idea that bilingualism is equal to assimilation but criticised the adoption of a bilingual education model without proper preparatory measures. Summing up, Mr Pabriks characterised the Latvian legislation as non-assimilative and promoting social unity.

Answering to the questions, Mr Pabriks accepted the idea of cautious and justified changes of national laws, if international law requires this. He confirmed that the opinions of local Russian politicians are too often ignored but pointed out that representatives of many other groups face the same problem. He did not regard the slow pace of naturalisation as sufficient reason for a change of the Law on Citizenship. In his opinion, language studies and the willingness to become a citizen should precede naturalisation. A Latvian official pointed out the lack of motivation of

some minority members to naturalise and offered two possible reasons: to avoid military service in the Latvian army and to be able to make regular visits to Russia.

Then seminar participants discussed the question of state language proficiency requirements for deputies, which are applied to parliament and local council members in Estonia and Latvia. A participant from Latvia reported the semi-official practice of ‘surprise language control’ of minority candidates at their working place. One such case will be handled soon by the European Court for Human Rights (a person with a language proficiency certificate was rejected the right to run for office after such a control).

Mr **Aleksei Semjonov**, Director of the Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, Tallinn, started his presentation with the claim that national laws are to be blamed for the isolation of minorities in Estonia. In 1992, the new Constitution stipulated some ethnic privileges of Estonians and the Law on Citizenship disenfranchised almost 40% of the population. In 1993, the Law on Local Elections granted non-citizens only active voting rights, and it was conditioned by additional requirements. The Law on Basic Schools and Gymnasiums stipulated abolishment of Russian secondary education, starting with the year 2000 (postponed to 2007 in 1997). The Law on Aliens did not recognise the status of de-facto permanent residents and created a chaotic situation with identity documents. The Law on Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities introduced an exclusive definition of minorities (only citizens of Estonia). Two years later, in 1995, the new Law on Language (to Mr Semjonov’s mind imposing a monolingual model of society and the state) and the new Law on Citizenship (additional restrictions and requirements) were adopted. In 1996, the Law on Local Elections was amended in regard of the state language proficiency requirements and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* was ratified with a declaration that only citizens can be minority members. From 1998 to 1999, different amendments were made to tighten linguistic requirements for deputies, for workers of the public sector, etc.

According to Mr Semjonov, as a result of such policies, in 1999 the share of Estonians among the population was 65,2% and among citizens 81%. Among the minorities, 62% are without Estonian citizenship, including 43% stateless persons (or

persons with ‘undetermined citizenship’ in official jargon). Illegal aliens compose 3-6% of the total population. The speed of naturalisation has drastically dropped after the new requirements of the 1995 Law on Citizenship were introduced.

Mr Semjonov stressed that there were some attempts to compensate minorities for the patterns of exclusion. Some liberalisation took place regarding naturalisation (for stateless children and the disabled), linguistic requirements for foreign experts in the private sector, school education (total abolishment of high school education in Russian was substituted with 60% reduction of Russian as a language of instruction), etc. Mr Semjonov argued that international standards could help to solve many problems.

During the discussion an Estonian official argued that according to a recent sociological poll minorities demonstrate a lack of motivation to receive citizenship. Mr Semjonov was surprised, as figures of several polls supplied him with contrary information and he thought such a tendency to be very negative, if it was true. He emphasized that non-citizens in Estonia have additional problems concerning job opportunities, housing, family reunification, etc. and stressed that the motivation to learn Estonian is higher among citizens that enjoy the sense of belonging to the state and to society.

Responding to other questions, Mr Semjonov pointed out that positive integrative effects could not be achieved without ensuring equal rights and opportunities for everyone. He therefore regards the facilitation of naturalisation as crucial. Any remaining fears of the majority population after nine years of independence could be treated as unfounded or caused by lack of information. Many scholars have come to the conclusion that at the beginning of the 1990s a fictitious restitution principle in regard of citizenship was adopted to promote a soft expulsion of the Russian-speaking population from the country. Today it is obvious that a few more Russian deputies in the parliament would not endanger the Estonian statehood.

A Russian participant from Latvia stressed that the present solution of the citizenship question put additional obstacles in the process of privatisation for the minority population. Different participants stressed the idea that minorities in Estonia and

Latvia feel betrayed by the local and national governments, taking into account political developments before and after 1991. A foreign expert argued that it is extremely important not to make minorities feel betrayed and to respect widely recognised international standards on minority rights.

CLOSING OF THE SEMINAR

In the beginning of the closing session, Mr **Priit Järve** (ECMI) drew the participants' attention to the fact that in four years Latvia and Estonia expect to become members of the European Union. Minority rights and problems of national integration will inevitably influence the perception of the two countries. He reminded the participants that the ECMI Baltic Seminar was the first meeting in a series of events dedicated to the topic of integration in Estonia and Latvia. He pointed out that while this seminar was dealing with more general aspects of integration, the topics and objectives of the planned follow-up meetings in Estonia and Latvia will be comparatively more practical.

The participants of the seminar then discussed the issues, which should be included in the follow-on workshops and agreed on the following topics:

- Impact of human rights legislation on national integration and the accession of Estonia and Latvia to the EU
- National legislation and international standards in language policy and minority education
- The future of the Russian language schools in Estonia and Latvia
- Civic education, multiculturalism and integration
- The role of the NGO sector and local governments in integration, relations between majority NGOs and minority NGOs
- Possible involvement of conservative politicians in the integration debate
- The role of women in integration
- Social dimension of integration
- Political atmosphere of the debate on statelessness

- Political participation and citizenship
- Indicators of integration and the evaluation of progress

During the discussion the participants made proposals that the follow-up workshops should:

- pay special attention to the EU requirements that will influence minority-related national legislation and to the monitoring of such legislation
- not limit study of the situation to official data
- pay more attention to practical issues and patterns of everyday life
- not just compare the content of integration programmes in Estonia and Latvia but also put emphasis on the results of their implementation
- ensure more active participation of scholars from different social sciences
- evaluate effectiveness and applicability of educational and language study models
- follow the progress in the field of naturalisation
- pay more attention to the involvement of the youth and to introduce gender impact to integration issues
- involve public opinion leaders, e.g., prominent journalists and politicians including those from conservative parties
- open active discussion dedicated to the role, problems and actual involvement of NGOs in the implementation of integration programmes

Representatives of international organisations stressed the importance of naturalisation, language study and educational reform as related issues under the conditions of approaching accession to the EU. They appreciated the progress made in that sphere and stated that the unsolved problems of Estonia and Latvia will be at the centre of their attention.

Closing the seminar, Mr Järve thanked Minister Saks, Minister Labucka and the other seminar participants for their active and fruitful work.

THE FOLLOW-ON PROCESS

Responding to the recommendations made at the seminar, the ECMI has decided to seek to organise several workshops in Estonia and in Latvia in 2001 and 2002 to follow up the issues reflected in this report. This follow-on process will aim to assist international and regional organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union in their efforts to facilitate and secure the process of national integration in Estonia and Latvia. It seeks to highlight the need to add to the debate about citizenship, which dominates the well-rehearsed discourse on this matter. In this respect, it will emphasise novel initiatives at all levels of governance (local, regional, and national), which aim to ensure equal participation of members of non-dominant groups in all areas of public authority.

The follow-on process will:

- highlight regional and local initiatives to overcome exclusion through naturalisation and participation in governance
- participate through follow-on events in monitoring and developing further the new initiatives that may have been agreed
- propose further action to accelerate the process of national integration
- establish concrete action plans in relation to individual issue areas, the implementation of which can be tracked over time.

The common feature of the workshops will be that participants include the representatives of minority NGOs and of both local (regional) and national levels of administration. To facilitate information exchange between Estonia and Latvia, which are tackling similar problems of integration, representatives of Latvia will be invited to workshops in Estonia and *vice versa*. Briefing papers by external experts will be prepared for all workshops. These papers will shape the discussion and help draft the recommendations, or concluding documents as necessary contributions to the concluding evaluation conference of the project.

During the project phase, the ECMI will make itself available as an expert institution to support the implementation of new initiatives through advisory services. The

workshops will also assist in ensuring that the recommended initiatives are indeed carried through at local, regional and national level. These meetings will prepare the concluding seminar in 2002, which will consider the progress that has been made in each of the individual issue areas and identify further recommendations on the basis of this experience.

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APPENDIX

TABLE I

Ethnic composition of the population of Estonia in the beginning of 2000

Ethnic nationality	
TOTAL	1 439 197
Estonians	939 310
Russians	403 925
Ukrainians	36 467
Byelorussians	21 125
Finns	12 762
Jews	2 275
Tatars	3 232
Germans	1 228
Latvians	2 638
Poles	2 290
Lithuanians	2 188
Other ethnic nationalities	11 757

Source: Statistical Office of Estonia

TABLE II

Legal status of national minorities in Estonia in 1999 (%)

Citizens of Estonia	38
Citizens of Russia	18
Citizens of other states	1
Persons without citizenship	43

Source: Data by the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board

TABLE III

Inhabitants of Latvia - ethnicity and citizenship in the beginning of 2000

	Citizens	% of citizens	Non-citizens	% of non-citizens	Others	%	Total	%	% of ethnicity with citizenship
Latvians	1369042	77.21	4647	0.79	748	2.83	1374437	57.58	99.6
Russians	297792	16.80	392941	66.86	16108	61.04	706841	29.61	42.1
Byelorussians	22580	1.27	74091	12.61	1300	4.93	97971	4.10	23.0
Ukrainians	6382	0.36	54679	9.30	2875	10.89	63936	2.68	10.0
Poles	39600	2.23	20106	3.42	343	1.30	60049	2.52	65.9
Lithuanians	15496	0.87	17081	2.91	1009	3.82	33586	1.41	46.1
Jews	5770	0.33	4510	0.77	292	1.11	10572	0.44	54.6
Roma	7470	0.42	665	0.11	14	0.05	8149	0.34	91.7
Germans	1320	0.07	1997	0.34	229	0.87	3546	0.15	37.2
Tartars	229	0.01	2791	0.47	168	0.64	3188	0.13	7.2
Estonians	1440	0.08	1012	0.17	224	0.85	2676	0.11	53.8
Armenians	407	0.02	1977	0.34	231	0.88	2615	0.11	15.6
Moldavans	207	0.01	1591	0.27	98	0.37	1896	0.08	10.9
Azerbaijanis	232	0.01	1366	0.23	99	0.38	1697	0.07	13.7
Georgians	241	0.01	718	0.12	79	0.30	1038	0.04	23.2
Others	4844	0.27	7553	1.29	2572	9.75	14969	0.63	32.4
TOTAL	1773052		587725		26389		2387166		74.3

Source: Population Register of Latvia